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Wednesday, October 3, 2007

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Sex assault investigation could be authorized today

Morning update

Dan Meisler
Daily Press & Argus

An official investigation into the alleged sex assault involving three elementary-age students on a Howell school bus could be authorized tonight.

The Howell Public Schools Board of Education has scheduled a special meeting to give its law firm the authority to start an investigation.

"We need to do it quickly to get the attorney moving," said board President Phil Westmoreland.

The investigation would be conducted by an attorney from the district's firm under contract, the Thrun Law Firm.

But the attorney asking questions of school officials in the probe would be unfamiliar with the district, by design, Westmoreland said.

The meeting will include a closed session to consider a letter to board from the law firm protected from public viewing under the Freedom of Information Act because of attorney-client privilege.

Westmoreland said the goal of the investigation is not to uncover any criminal wrongdoing, but to find out where internal communications broke down. At least one school principal, and possibly two, may have known of the alleged assault.

The same for other school officials like the transportation manager.

But Superintendent Chuck Breiner has said he didn't find out until mid-September.

"We hear a different story every day," Westmoreland said. The goal of the investigation is to find out "who knew what when, and who told who."

The meeting will also have a period for public comment, as do all school board meetings.

The bus episode prompted a large and emotional town hall meeting last week at which parents wanted to know what the district is doing to make students safe on the buses.

Contact Daily Press & Argus reporter Dan Meisler at (517) 552-2857 or at dmeisler@gannett.com.

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Baby's dad to get psych testing

Wednesday, October 03, 2007

By Steven Hepker%%par%%

shepker@citpat.com -- 768-4923%%par%%

Lawyers will seek psychological testing for a Lake Columbia man accused of beating and sexually assaulting his 3-month-old daughter.

The competency exam will postpone the scheduled Oct. 30 preliminary hearing for Kirk Coleman by one to two months, District Judge R. Darryl Mazur said Tuesday.

Also Tuesday, Mazur granted a motion by defense attorneys Dennis Hurst and Michael Rosenthal to limit statements to the media by investigators, prosecutors, the defense and child-welfare workers.

Assistant Prosecutor Allison Bates also signed the motion.

The order forbids statements to reporters ``that would have the substantial likelihood of materially prejudicing the legal proceedings."

Details of the near-death beating of the 3-month-old have moved some citizens to tears, prayers and protests. Hurst said ``conclusory" statements in the media could hurt Coleman's chance of a fair trial.

Coleman, 27, is charged with first-degree child abuse and first-degree criminal sexual conduct. He is free on a \$100,000 bond and attended court Tuesday with his parents.

Blackman Township investigators allege Coleman beat and raped his daughter on Sept. 13-14 in the apartment he shared with his wife, Ashley Rogers.

The baby initially was on a ventilator with head injuries, 11 broken ribs, fractures to her legs and broken eye sockets, investigators said. The extent of injuries, including possible brain damage, will be learned over time.

``It is going to be an ongoing discovery process," Bates said of the flow of medical records from the University of Michigan Hospital to prosecutors and public safety officials.

Child Protective Services suspended parental rights for both parents, making the baby a ward of the state.

Readers from across the nation continue to respond with e-mails and phone calls to the newspaper. A fund for the child continues to gather donations at American 1 Federal Credit Union branches in Jackson County.

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Bishop: Nobody Got Everything They Wanted

Senate Majority Leader Mike **BISHOP** was interviewed this morning at around 4 a.m. by a gaggle of reporters just outside his office following nearly four days of continuous session that resulted in a \$1.48 billion tax increase being put into place.

The following is the exchange between reporters and the Senate Majority Leader:

Q. What do you make of the result?

A. It's late at night. We've worked hard for a long-time and it's going to be a while before we get the state turned around. The key is we have to continue to work together. This is the first step along the way.

Senate Republicans have stood for a very consistent position of cutting back government and reforming government and we feel that we made some significant strides in those areas tonight. We're disappointed that part of the revenue that we face tonight is a tax increase. We don't think that's the way to turn the state around. I am personally disappointed by that — our members are going to continue to work hard though and continue to do what we can to make this state the best place to live, work and raise a family.

I tell you, it's been a long couple of days, but we're coming out of this having been through a lot and I think we're better for it. We've got a long ways to go though, and we're going to work together to find better remedies in the future.

From my perspective, we've been fighting for so long on the idea of cuts and reforms and the governor has been pushing so hard for so long on the idea of tax increases and we've been fighting back and trying to prop up our position as best we can. Tonight, she does control Michigan government. The Democratic Party does control Michigan government and they took a step towards their own agenda, as well.

We hope that with some of the reforms we established tonight that we made some progress on our agenda, as well. No one got everything they wanted tonight and hopefully we'll continue to work well together in the future.

Q. What is the priority now as you work together on the '08 budget?

The priority now is to actually go through all the budgets and we have to go through the target-setting process. We're right at the beginning of the target-setting process. Now that we know what our numbers are, we can do that. Now that we have a continuation budget we'll do it as fast as we can, but we'll have some breathing room.

Q. House Speaker Andy **DILLON said you'd already agreed on \$400 million in cuts ...**

A. Over \$400 million. Part of the deal was that we had well over \$400 million in cuts. That's what we demanded from the get go because we believe in order to turn the state around you've got to significantly downsize government to start. We didn't want to run into the same problems as last year and the years before - pushing debt forward. We actually have to come up with real cuts and that's what we did.

Q. Where will those cuts be?

A. In every category. Every budget has been cut and we have found savings in all of our major budgets — Corrections, DHS, all of the major budgets. We grew a couple of budgets that would be in the area of education — that's always a priority for us. But, they are smaller increases this year, one percent. That is the nature of our state right now. We're doing our best to deal with the economic crisis we have. Just like every family budget, the state now is a situation where it has to cut back.

We're glad that we're in a situation where we're actually able to control those expenditures.



A (temporary) budget fix

Wednesday, October 03, 2007

The state budget deal was an ugly solution to an ugly problem -- a \$1.75 billion shortfall that followed successive years of shortfalls. The compromise rested heavily on tax increases, and not heavily enough on changing the costs of governing. Reducing those expenses must be a continuing task for lawmakers. So should separating essential from nonessential spending, and diminishing the latter.

The solution struck in the wee hours of Monday morning raises and expands taxes, makes cuts to some government services and institutes some too-long-in-coming reforms.

All this was done after lawmakers actually shut down state government for a few hours, a juvenile dereliction of legislative duty.

The inability of legislators to pass a budget by the Oct. 1 deadline illustrated the triumph of political self-interest over the public interest. Gov. Jennifer Granholm, Democrats and Republicans all share the blame.

The income tax increase from 3.9 percent to 4.35 percent is lamentable but necessary. Trying to solve the state budget crisis with cuts alone, after years of paring back, would have sliced too deeply into state services. As things stand, the Legislature will have \$435 million in spending to reduce.

Those cuts must be identified in the next month, but will likely result in freezes to university and community college spending, cuts in Medicaid and scaling back a planned increase in K-12 funding.

The income tax hike comes with a sunset date, rolling back to the current 3.9 percent rate by Oct. 1, 2015. That is a good limitation.

But it also kicks the state's financial problems to a future Legislature and governor.

Expanding the 6 percent sales tax to certain services, the second major tax increase in the compromise, could cause more trouble. The move has the merit of shifting Michigan's tax base on to the growing service sector. But it sets up an entirely new tax structure for some businesses.

Also, the odd amalgam of services to be taxed verifies the sausage-making aspect of politics and raises a raft of questions.

The tax targets include consulting services, janitorial services and landscaping. Why is skiing taxed and not golf? Why massages but not movies? Why baby shoe bronzing but not haircuts? Any tax structure has winners and losers. This one seems more random than most, and therefore wide open to charges of unfairness.

Some reforms accompanied the tax increases. Recalcitrant Democrats finally supported the central and common-sense proposal from Senate Republicans aimed at reducing the cost of health insurance for public employees, especially teachers. The bills allow for competitive bidding of insurance, requiring disclosure of claims data of the insurers for school districts of over 100 employees, and enables pooling of health insurance by local governments and school districts.

Also, new teachers will pay more into their retirement system, and work longer to get maximum health insurance benefits.

In addition, the Legislature will conduct a series of government efficiency studies to look for places to cut waste.

Lawmakers still need to take a serious run at reducing prison costs, a huge portion of the budget.

Also needed is a systematic look at the price tag for running Michigan's universities, and an aggressive plan to eliminate duplicate programs and the promotional costs tied to in-state inter-college competition.

Even as they went after teacher health insurance, lawmakers left untouched their own exorbitant health care bargain. They receive free insurance after age 55 with as little as six years of service. If they're serious about reform, they'll start with themselves.

Those are just a handful of the many changes that could reduce the over-all costs of government in Michigan. The Legislature has passed a budget for this year. Getting a handle on the years ahead remains important -- and unfinished -- business.

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MORNING SUN

Dancers lead fight for fathers' rights

By SUSAN FIELD
Clare Managing Editor

Dawn Thomas has been fighting a battle on behalf of her son and grandson for two years.

Derek Bailey of Traverse City has been fighting to see his children since a court referee allowed his ex-girlfriend to move with them to Alberta.

Bailey, the founder of Dance4Equality, Thomas and others were across the street from the Isabella County courthouse Tuesday, bringing awareness to their plight.

Members of the group bring the issue to light through traditional Native dance.

Bailey, a member of the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, was living in Mt. Pleasant when his ex-girlfriend moved the children to Canada with the court's permission, according to his aunt, Maren Bailey.

Members of the group use the traditional dances to bring attention to their cause, which asserts that mothers get preference over fathers in too many divorce situations.

What Thomas, the Baileys and others want people to be aware of is the alleged "inequality" in rights between mothers and fathers.

Derek Bailey founded Dance4Equality to promote advocacy for awareness and change.

Thomas said the issue is not just statewide but national.

The system, Thomas said, is biased toward women and is harming children by separating them from their fathers.

Derek Bailey believes that the best way to protect children from the stresses of divorce or separation of parents is to ensure a strong relationship with both parents, when both are fit.

While Thomas said her son filed for custody of his son, the court ruled that he could only have visitation six nights a month, and only if the visits did not interfere with the boy's mother's schedule.

Thomas said the system enables manipulative women to use their children against their fathers.

While Thomas and others put the blame on the friend of the court, that is misdirected, one Isabella County official said.

Greg Fogle, assistant friend of the court, said his department is responsible for enforcing court orders, not to investigate claims of neglect or abuse.

In those cases, Fogle said, the Michigan Department of Human Services investigates and makes recommendations to the court.

Charges of neglect must carry proof for courts to order changes in custody, Fogle said, and courts are leaning toward joint physical custody when possible.

Despite what Maren Bailey and Thomas say, Fogle said there are avenues a father can take when he believes he is not being treated fairly.

"There are procedures to hold custodial parents accountable," Fogle said.

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Grant assists seniors, infants

Gladwin County Record

Last updated: Tuesday, October 02nd, 2007 12:11:21 PM

LANSING -- Michigan's seniors and infants will be warmer and safer with the help of a \$335,000 federal energy assistance grant.

The Michigan Department of Human Services was one of two states and four Native American tribes to earn grants from the Residential Energy Assistance Challenge Program.

These federal funds are set aside to serve the needs of specific groups and are not available for any other purpose. The grant-funded programs will be offered in addition to regular emergency energy and weatherization funding available to low-income residents.

DHS will select three community agencies to administer the new funds through a program called Michigan Working for Intelligent Safe Energy. The agencies will focus on low-income households that include seniors and infants and provide comprehensive case management and support services to address energy-related health and safety issues. A major goal will be to address lack of heat and unsafe heating that lead to unsafe sleep practices for infants.

"The grant funds make it possible for us to help the most vulnerable individuals who are most likely to be impacted by unsafe heating equipment or homes that have not been weatherized," said Dwayne Haywood, director of DHS' Bureau of Community Action and Economic Opportunity.

The grant includes up to \$35,000 for administration and evaluation activities, including referrals, utility bill monitoring and reduction in the need for emergency energy relief.

The average American family can spend as much as \$1,300 annually on utility bills, which can represent about 20-40 percent of a low-income family's income. Weatherizing a home can reduce that cost as much as \$300 annually. For more information go to www.michigan.gov/dhs or <http://www.michigan.gov/dhs-weatherization>.

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Foster care funds don't cover parents' bills, report says

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By **Wendy Koch**, USA TODAY

Most states pay foster parents far less than what middle-income families spend to raise their children, says a report out today by University of Maryland researchers.

"Foster parents should receive the funds they need," says co-author Julie Farber, director of policy at Children's Rights, a New York-based advocacy group. Too often, she says, they either stop taking in foster kids or dig into their own pockets to pay for prom dresses and Boy Scout uniforms.

TABLE: [Most states fall short of recommendations](#)

The report comes as more states report a shortage of families to care for the 500,000 children nationwide in foster care.

The report estimates the national average for monthly costs for healthy foster kids at \$629 for a 2-year-old, \$721 for a 9-year-old and \$790 for a 16-year-old.

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Only Arizona and the District of Columbia paid more for each age group, and most states paid far less, according to the report. Nebraska had the lowest monthly rate: \$226 for a 2-year-old. Families taking kids with disabilities receive higher "therapeutic" rates.

The report, citing the wide range of state payments, recommends a uniform rate that can be adjusted to account for varying costs of living. Its proposed rate is based on expenses reported by middle-income families in a Labor Department survey, plus a 22% increase for extra food and other things needed by foster kids who may have been malnourished or abused.

Most state rates fall far short of real costs, says Diane DePanfilis, co-author of the report and director of the Ruth Young Center for Families and Children at the University of Maryland School of Social Work.

Farber says the low rates make it difficult to sign up foster parents.

"That's not what we're hearing," says Susan Orr, associate commissioner of the U.S. Children's Bureau at the Department of Health and Human Services. She says foster parents tell the bureau they are more concerned

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about how much they must do, such as attend court hearings, than what they are paid.

"Mandating formulas has not been an effective tool," Orr says. She says states ought to decide rates and get greater flexibility in how they spend federal funds.

The report opens a national "conversation" about what foster parents are paid, says Fred Wulczyn, research fellow at Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago. If states can pay foster parents more, they should, Wulczyn says. But he adds, "Part of the foster care system has always been about altruism."

"Money is not the singular issue," but it is a "major" factor in recruiting and retaining middle- and low-income foster parents, says Linda Davis, who serves on an advisory board to the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare. In Milwaukee, she says, there are 650 foster families for 2,700 foster kids, so some children end up in group homes or institutional settings.

In California, the County Welfare Directors Association reported in May that there is a "serious statewide shortage" of foster families and that a key barrier is foster care rates that have been frozen for more than six years.

In a separate report out today, the National Council for Adoption calls for more money to recruit and train foster and adoptive parents. It says 22% of children in foster care are eligible for adoption but states spent only 1.3% of federal child-welfare funds to recruit and train parents for them.

Most states fall short of researchers' recommendations

Minimum monthly foster care payment, by state, for children ages 2, 9 and 16, and what the minimum rate should be to cover actual costs, according to a study released today (recommended rates do not include travel and child care expenses but include extra costs particular to children in foster care):

	Current rate			Recommended rate				Current rate			Recommended rate		
Age	2	9	16	2	9	16	Age	2	9	16	2	9	16
Ala.	\$410	\$434	\$446	\$567	\$650	\$712	Mont.	\$515	\$475	\$572	\$598	\$685	\$751
Alaska*	\$652	\$580	\$688	\$629	\$721	\$790	Neb.	\$226	\$359	\$359	\$636	\$729	\$799
Ariz.	\$793	\$782	\$879	\$606	\$695	\$762	Nev.	\$683	\$683	\$773	\$638	\$731	\$801
Ark.	\$400	\$425	\$475	\$558	\$639	\$701	N.H.	\$403	\$439	\$518	\$724	\$830	\$910
Calif.	\$425	\$494	\$597	\$685	\$785	\$861	N.J.	\$553	\$595	\$667	\$751	\$860	\$943
Colo.	\$348	\$392	\$423	\$659	\$755	\$828	N.M.	\$483	\$516	\$542	\$600	\$688	\$754
Conn.	\$756	\$767	\$834	\$756	\$866	\$950	N.Y.*	\$504	\$594	\$687	\$721	\$826	\$906
Del.	\$517	\$517	\$517	\$625	\$716	\$785	N.C.	\$390	\$440	\$490	\$630	\$722	\$792
D.C.	\$869	\$869	\$940	\$629	\$721	\$790	N.D.	\$370	\$418	\$545	\$584	\$669	\$734
Fla.	\$429	\$440	\$515	\$579	\$664	\$728	Ohio	\$275	\$275	\$275	\$635	\$727	\$797
Ga.	\$416	\$471	\$540	\$588	\$674	\$738	Okla.	\$365	\$430	\$498	\$557	\$639	\$700
Hawaii	\$529	\$529	\$529	\$629	\$721	\$790	Ore.	\$387	\$402	\$497	\$642	\$735	\$806
Idaho	\$274	\$300	\$431	\$602	\$689	\$756	Pa.*	\$640	\$640	\$640	\$671	\$770	\$844
Ill.	\$380	\$422	\$458	\$661	\$757	\$830	R.I.	\$438	\$416	\$480	\$723	\$828	\$908
Ind.	\$760	\$760	\$760	\$630	\$722	\$791	S.C.	\$332	\$359	\$425	\$576	\$660	\$723
Iowa	\$454	\$474	\$525	\$626	\$717	\$786	S.D.	\$451	\$451	\$542	\$633	\$726	\$795
Kan.	\$603	\$603	\$603	\$628	\$720	\$789	Tenn.	\$627	\$627	\$737	\$574	\$658	\$722
Ky.	\$599	\$599	\$660	\$569	\$652	\$715	Texas	\$652	\$652	\$652	\$557	\$638	\$700
La.	\$380	\$365	\$399	\$567	\$649	\$712	Utah	\$426	\$426	\$487	\$634	\$726	\$796
Maine	\$548	\$577	\$614	\$686	\$786	\$862	Vt.	\$475	\$528	\$584	\$705	\$808	\$886
Md.	\$735	\$735	\$750	\$628	\$720	\$789	Va.	\$368	\$431	\$546	\$605	\$694	\$760
Mass.	\$490	\$531	\$616	\$766	\$878	\$962	Wash.	\$374	\$451	\$525	\$657	\$753	\$826

Mich.	\$433	\$433	\$535	\$646	\$740	\$812	W.Va.	\$600	\$600	\$600	\$561	\$643	\$705
Minn.	\$585	\$585	\$699	\$661	\$758	\$830	Wis.	\$317	\$346	\$411	\$648	\$743	\$814
Miss.	\$325	\$355	\$400	\$555	\$636	\$697	Wyo.	\$645	\$664	\$732	\$608	\$696	\$763
Mo.	\$271	\$322	\$358	\$627	\$719	\$788	U.S. avg.	\$488	\$509	\$568	\$629	\$721	\$790

* — Alaska, New York and Pennsylvania do not have state-established minimum rates. For these states, the current rate is for each state's most populous region.

Source: Foster care study by the University of Maryland School of Social Work, National Foster Parent Association and Children's Rights

Posted 10h 31m ago

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Survey: Rates for Foster Care Inadequate

By DAVID CRARY – 8 hours ago

NEW YORK (AP) — Most states reimburse foster parents significantly less than the actual cost of raising a foster child, complicating the task of finding good homes for children who need them, according to a first-of-its-kind survey.

The survey analyzed regional living expenses and calculated on a state-by-state basis the minimum cost of adequately raising a foster child. Only Arizona and the District of Columbia pay foster parents more than this minimum amount, according the survey.

To adequately cover the cost of rearing a foster child, base payments in 28 states would need to be raised at least 50 percent, and five states — Idaho, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio and Wisconsin — would need to more than double their current base rates, according to report. It was compiled by the University of Maryland School of Social Work, the National Foster Parent Association, and Children's Rights, a New York-based advocacy group, for release Wednesday.

Of the more than 500,000 U.S. children in foster care at any given time, about 75 percent live with foster parents, while most of the others are placed in group homes and institutions.

The report expressed concern that inadequate reimbursement rates would worsen a shortfall of foster parents, "potentially increasing the likelihood that children will be placed in institutions or shuttled from one foster placement to another."

"The bottom line is that when these rates don't reflect the real expenses that foster parents face, it's the children who suffer," said Karen Jorgenson, executive director of the Foster Parent Association.

Although child welfare agencies are required by federal law to reimburse foster parents for the cost of raising foster children, there is no national minimum, leaving states and localities free to set their own rates. The result is a huge disparity. The base rates paid for raising a 2-year-old foster child range from \$236 a month in Nebraska to \$869 in the District of Columbia.

The "minimum adequate rates" in the report represented the cost of providing basic needs — housing, food, clothing, and school supplies — as well as a child's participation in normal after-school sports and activities.

The monthly rates recommended by the report, averaged out on a national basis, were \$629 for 2-year-olds, \$721 for 9-year-olds and \$790 for 16-year-olds. Currently, the average actual monthly base rates offered by states are \$488 for 2-year-olds, \$509 for 9-year-olds and \$568 for 16-year-olds.

While Arizona and the District of Columbia were the only jurisdictions whose base payments exceeded the recommended minimums, 10 other states fell short by only small amounts: Alaska, Connecticut, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Nevada, Tennessee, Texas, West Virginia and Wyoming.

In Nebraska, state officials had advance knowledge that the report would list it as having the lowest base rate, and the administrator of its Child Welfare Unit, Christine Hanus, sent a letter to Children's Rights expressing dismay.

Hanus noted that many Nebraska foster parents receive more than the minimum base rate, as well as extra payments for child care and other purposes. However, she acknowledged in

the letter that two-thirds of the payments for foster children under 6 were at the base level of \$236 a month — far below the minimum adequate rate of \$636 which the report recommended for Nebraska.

In a telephone interview, Hanus said Nebraska's foster parents were meeting the needs of the children in their care.

"Foster parents do not leave because of the money or the care rates," she said.

In Missouri, Department of Social Services Director Deborah Scott noted the state recently increased subsidies to foster parents for the first time since 2001, but acknowledged the rates were still below recommended guidelines.

Julie Farber, director of policy for Children's Rights, said she hoped child welfare officials in states with low rates would use the report to press their legislatures for more funding.

In California, Farber said, the number of foster parents has been dropping, and child welfare officials already have cited inadequate reimbursement as a factor.

"They know it stands in the way of doing their job," she said.

Associated Press writer Oskar Garcia in Omaha, Neb., contributed to this report.

IN OUR OPINION

Pass kids' health care plan over veto

October 3, 2007

An undeservedly quarrelsome future awaits the State Children's Health Insurance Program, known as SCHIP, based on a veto expected today from President George W. Bush and new administrative rules being challenged by eight states.

Michigan did not join lawsuits led by New York and New Jersey's governors over the new rules, because they do not affect the state, at least for now. Instead, Michigan put its hopes on Congress, which enacted a bipartisan bill that not only voided the rules but raised funding -- an increase that translated to \$60 million for Michigan and the ability to cover about 80,000 more children, by one estimate.

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The new rules from the Bush administration prohibit any variation from strict income limits. SCHIP is designed to help working families who make too much to qualify for Medicaid but do not have enough resources to pay for health insurance. The administration enforced a top limit set at 250% of the poverty level -- a workable cap in some places but an unrealistic one for high-cost states such as those in the Northeast.

The Bush administration has stood fast on its assertion that SCHIP should focus only on the very poorest children, even though health care is becoming unaffordable for middle-income families, too. Bush also has talked about SCHIP expansion as a foot in the door for nationalized health care. But that contention looks thin -- and nakedly political -- when most states administer the program through private insurers and managed care companies.

Congress, to its credit, wrote a bipartisan SCHIP bill to get health insurance to more children without deficit spending. Lawmakers sent the bill to cigarette smokers via a 61-cent-a-pack tax increase.

The final legislation was a solid compromise that drew a veto-proof majority in the Senate, though not in the House. Still, a Bush veto may inspire some House members to change their minds and avoid the heat of further negotiation. Surely this country can keep children from suffering even as the political acrimony grows over health care for everyone else.

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Ehlers will fight Bush veto on kids' insurance

Wednesday, October 03, 2007

By Kyla King

The Grand Rapids Press

When President Bush makes good today on his threat to veto a \$35 billion expansion in children's health insurance passed by Congress last week, at least two West Michigan lawmakers say they will vote to override it.

Reps. Vern Ehlers, R-Grand Rapids, and Fred Upton, R-St. Joseph, who voted in favor of the original legislation, say they likely would join Democrats and some House Republicans in voting to override.

However, the House is about two dozen votes short of the number needed.

"That's my plan at this point," said Ehlers, a longtime supporter of the program who said he shares concerns about expanding spending on it.

"(Democrats) were taking a perfectly good program and, instead of just renewing it, messing with it," Ehlers said. "But on balance, I decided the bill was good enough to vote for."

Upton also would vote to override a veto, said his spokesman, Sean Bonyun.

Both Republicans are on a list of GOP lawmakers the United Auto Workers union is targeting to vote for an override, for which a two-thirds majority is needed.

The group is not targeting Rep. Pete Hoekstra, R-Holland, who voted against the legislation.

In a statement on his Web site, Hoekstra said he voted against expanding the program because it would allow those over 18, children from middle-income families, and illegal immigrants to take advantage of a program designed for low-income families.

The legislation would add \$35 billion over five years to the 10-year-old State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), which is known as the MICHild program in Michigan.

Enrollment in MICHild has gone from 28 children in June 1998 to 34,218 in June 2006.

The program was created to provide insurance to kids whose parents made too much money to qualify for Medicaid coverage, but could not afford to buy private health insurance.

Currently, the program provides insurance to 6.6 million children. The expanded legislation would add 4 million children, by raising the income limits for their parents. The expansion would be paid for by raising the cigarette tax.

Send e-mail to the author: kking@grpress.com

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Life in Focus - UCP Michigan

Wednesday, October 3, 2007

Watch "Medicaid: Our Neighbors, Our Communities"

Your friend, seventygra@gmail.com, has sent you the following video:

Medicaid: Our Neighbors, Our Communities



12 min 56 sec - Oct 1, 2007

Description: Medicaid cuts hurt people, especially children, working families, and people with disabilities. You may be surprised by some of the facts presented here. Produced by the Michigan Developmental Disabilities Council and United Cerebral Palsy of Michigan.

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Posted by Glenn at UCP Michigan at 10:32 AM

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Michigan Senate approves Medicaid estate recovery bill

Healthcare News

Published: Tuesday, 2-Oct-2007

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The Michigan Senate on Thursday approved legislation that would require the state [Department of Community Health](#) to develop a program to recoup costs paid by Medicaid for people who lived in nursing homes or received in-home care services before their death, the [Detroit News](#) reports.

Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm (D) was expected to sign the bill.

The state is the last in the nation to pass an estate recovery program required by federal law. Department of Community Health Director Janet Olszewski, in a letter to state senators earlier this month, wrote that the state could lose \$5 billion -- or more than 50% of the state's \$8.6 billion Medicaid budget -- in federal Medicaid payments if the state does not comply with the requirement by Sept. 30.

Under the bill, nursing home residents who are current Medicaid beneficiaries would be exempt from estate recovery efforts. Exemptions also include homes occupied by spouses, children who are minors or relatives with disabilities. People also would be able to seek a "hardship exemption," according to the *News*. In addition, the measure requires examining options for a voluntary estate preservation program, which could allow residents to make payments to avoid estate recovery.

State Medicaid Director Paul Reinhart said that while the number of elderly people who rely on Medicaid to pay their long-term care costs makes up a small portion of the state's 1.6 million Medicaid beneficiaries, their care accounts for 25% of the Medicaid budget. Reinhart added that the number of Medicaid beneficiaries who will be subject to estate recovery is expected to increase from 40,500 in 2010 to 61,000 in 2030 (Kozlowski, *Detroit News*, 9/28).

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Published October 3, 2007

Nursing home inspection results

Inspectors found health deficiencies at most nursing homes in Clinton, Eaton and Ingham counties during their most recent inspections. Officials say most facilities quickly fix those problems, which can vary from minor issues to those that immediately endanger patients.

Facility No. of health deficiencies*

Burcham Hills Retirement Center 7

Courts of Holt - Nursing and Rehabilitation 13

Dimondale Nursing Care Center 28

East Lansing Health Care Center 10

Eaton County Medical Care Facility 9

Hazel I. Findlay Country Manor 0

Ingham County Medical Care Facility 5

Ovid Healthcare Center 10

Pines Healthcare Center 18

Stockbridge Country Manor 20

Tendercare South 34

Tendercare West 8

Whitehills Health Care Center 9

* According to most recent inspection reports

Source: Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services,
www.medicare.gov/NHcompare

Tendercare residents waiting for new homes

60 patients forced to relocate due to closing of facility

Jeremy W. Steele
Lansing State Journal

Area nursing homes should have room to absorb the evicted residents of Lansing's Tendercare South, patient advocates and nursing home officials say.

But that probably won't make being forced out any easier for the 60 patients who were still living this

week at the soon-to-be shuttered facility.

"This is their home and sometimes in even the worst situations residents want to remain," said Helen Hicks, executive director of nursing home patient advocacy group Citizens for Better Care. "Their family is really the other residents they see every day."

Officials at Sault Ste. Marie-based Tendercare (Michigan) Inc. decided to close the 120-bed facility after it failed three attempts to pass its annual state inspection. Federal officials have stopped Medicare and Medicaid payments to the facility as a result.

A team of state experts is on-site, working with nursing home staff and patient advocates to relocate residents.

That team also is watching over patients' care.

Tendercare officials have not said what will happen to the facility or its nearly 100 workers.

And finding new homes for patients could take a month, state officials said.

Officials are trying to relocate residents to facilities in Ingham County, said Hicks, whose group is involved in the relocation efforts. Detroit-based Citizens for Better Care provides ombudsmen to investigate and help resolve complaints about care in most Michigan nursing homes.

Rooms available

There likely are at least 100 nursing home beds not being used in the tri-county area.

Nursing home occupancies vary from day to day, but a July survey by the Lansing State Journal found only 92 percent of the 1,647 nursing home beds in Clinton, Eaton and Ingham counties were in use. Those figures do not include Hospice House of Mid-Michigan, which is licensed as a nursing home and provides end-of-life care.

Although finding a room might not be a problem, finding the right level of care could be.

Some patients might have special needs because of dementia or other illnesses that certain nursing homes aren't equipped to handle.

Tendercare South residents likely will jump to the top of facility waiting lists because their situations will be deemed emergencies, said Susan O'Shea, administrator of the 236-bed Ingham County Medical Care Facility. The county-owned nursing home likely will take on a few Tendercare residents, she said. But its 26-bed dementia unit is full.

'Unfortunate situation'

Moving nearly 60 patients from Tendercare South so quickly will be a tough task, O'Shea said.

"If you were just talking about one or two people, usually we have one or two beds open," O'Shea said.

"To do this within 30 days, that's just mindboggling."

State officials have a good track record of "bending over backward" to help displaced nursing home residents, patient advocates said.

Residents still face a stressful time. Advocates pointed to several studies that have shown moving nursing home residents en masse causes stress and in some cases is linked to higher mortality rates.

Department of Community Health spokesman T.J. Bucholz, who did not return a phone call seeking comment Tuesday, has said officials recognize the risks.

"Closing a nursing home is never the best solution to everyone, but our primary responsibility is to the health and safety of residents there," he said Monday.

On Monday, Tendercare spokesman Paul Stavros called the closing an "extremely unfortunate situation."

He said Tendercare staff were doing all they could help residents move.

He did not return a call for further comment Tuesday.

34 deficiencies found

Tendercare South was hit with 34 health deficiencies during its May inspection, according to information from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

It's not uncommon for inspectors to find problems. Only one nursing home in the tricity area passed its last inspection without a health deficiency of some sort.

Ex-patient likes site

Even inspections at facilities owned by the same company vary. Tendercare West, also owned by Tendercare (Michigan) Inc., in Delta Township had eight health deficiencies in the latest inspection reported by Medicare.

Tendercare South had nearly three times the area's average number of inspection problems. And, state officials have said, some of those problems weren't fixed during two follow-up inspections.

Still, some patients have been pleased with recent care at the facility.

Lansing Township resident Susan Escobedo, 58, said she spent two months at the nursing home after a February car accident left her unable to walk. The accident put her into a coma, punctured her left lung, cracked three ribs and broke both legs.

"I had excellent therapy over there," she said. "It's a shame they're closing now."

Contact Jeremy W. Steele at 377-1015 or jwsteele@lsj.com.

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